April 14, 2011

SUBJECT: Unacceptable Use of the Internet

   TO: All MWA Employees

FROM: Laurence D. Chandler
           Director, Midwest Area

The Chief Information Officer for ARS issued **Policy and Procedure 253.4** entitled Use of Information Technology Resources outlining acceptable and unacceptable uses of the Internet. I'd like to pass on some specific information on this subject and caution you about particular uses of the Internet that are being monitored closely by USDA's Office of Cybersecurity.

Any of the following use of information technology resources is unacceptable:

- The creation, downloading, viewing, storage, or copying of sexually-explicit or sexually-oriented materials.
- The creation, downloading, viewing, storage, copying, or transmission of materials related to gambling, weapons, terrorist activities, and any other illegal or prohibited activities.
- Posting agency information to external news groups, bulletin boards, or other public forums without authority. This includes any use that could create the perception that the communication was made in one's official capacity as a Federal Government employee, unless appropriate agency approval has been obtained.
- Using Government systems as a staging ground or platform to gain unauthorized access to other systems.
- The unauthorized acquisition, use, reproduction, transmission, and distribution of computer software or other material protected by national and international copyright laws, trademarks, or other intellectual property rights.
- Participating in chat rooms.
- The use of Peer-to-Peer (P2P) software is prohibited (see McClanahan memo, 6/8/06).

Recently, the Office of Cybersecurity has seen increased usage of peer-to-peer or file sharing software. This is software, available for download from the Internet that allows the swapping of files across the Internet. These include, but are not limited to, BitTorrent, Gnutella, LimeWire, SwapNut, Kazaa, and Morpheous.

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The principal use of peer-to-peer software is for the illegal exchange of software, music, videos and pornography. This type of usage is not allowed by law, USDA regulation, and ARS policies. Not only is it illegal, but these activities clog networks, slow down use of the Internet for legitimate business purposes, and open our networks to intrusion by outsiders.

What does this mean to you?

It means that you aren't anonymous when you surf the Internet or engage in file swapping. The Office of Cybersecurity uses an Intrusion Detection System which tracks every access an employee makes when retrieving unauthorized music, videos, pornography, and software. When the Department finds questionable activity, the following actions will result:

- **Pornography.** The Office of Cybersecurity will forward instances of pornography viewing or trafficking immediately to the Office of Inspector General for investigation. They refer any references to child pornography directly to the appropriate United States Attorney's office. This can lead to disciplinary action up to dismissal or even criminal prosecution.
- **Software Piracy.** All instances of software piracy are forwarded to the United States Attorney's office. This is a criminal offense with possible fines of up to $100,000 per instance.
- **Music Files.** Swapping copyrighted music files (e.g., MP3 files) will be referred to the Employee Relations Branch in Human Resources Division for appropriate disciplinary action.

This is a serious issue. Don't risk your career. If you have installed peer-to-peer software on your computer, uninstall it **immediately**! If you need help with this, please contact your local Information Technology support staff, Administrative Officer, or the Midwest Area Information Technology Office, at mwahelpdesk@ars.usda.gov .

Thank you for your attention to this matter.